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ABSTRACT

Partnerships between higher education and public schools in rural areas can lead to improved education in both sectors. When launching a partnership, all concerned must convince a wide sector of the community that such programs are cost effective and will lead to more successful educational programming. By providing such a rationale early, the type of support needed from the public and business community will be easier to secure. Regional demographics must be fully reviewed and understood by all participating groups. Rural area partnerships must take into account isolation, transportation issues, and distance between schools and the university. A partnership venture requires strong commitment and leadership from several sectors if it is to succeed. In particular, the public school superintendent, the president of the university, and the dean of the college of education must be highly visible in their support of the partnership. Well-developed partnerships will include an advisory committee, partnership staff, record-keeping procedures, program activities, and evaluation and reporting procedures. Following these guidelines, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Armstrong and Indiana Counties' Intermediate Unit #28, and the counties' 11 school districts have created a successful partnership, initiating 40 educational improvement projects since 1983. (JHZ)

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School Partnerships in Education: A Rural Consortium

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INTRODUCTION

The development of partnership activities between the higher education and public school community has received increasing interest and emphasis over the past five years. This interdependence between universities and their colleagues in the public school sector has received recognition as a valuable activity that would lead to the enhancement of educational efforts in both sectors. From our perspective, developing partnerships in a rural area has been profitable in developing new programs, enhancing faculty skills, and increasing community involvement. In this symposium, we will provide an overview of the planning process that must take place in establishing successful partnerships in a rural area.

When launching a partnership, all concerned must be able to convince a wide sector of the community that such programs are both cost effective and will lead to more successful educational programming. By providing such a rationale early, the type of support needed from the public and business community will be easier to secure.

As part of developing a partnership in a rural area, it is important that regional demographics be fully reviewed and understood by all participating groups. In the presentation an overview of the region, which will focus on demographics and unique regional characteristics, will be provided. The forming of partnerships in the rural area must take into account isolation, transportation issues, and distance between schools and

the university. In particular, this two-county area encompasses eleven school districts, two area vocational technical schools and one major university providing a variety of advanced programs for candidates pursuing post-secondary study.

In response to President Reagan's Proclamation of 1983 as the National Year of Partnerships in Education, the President of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the Dean of the College of Education, the Executive Director of the Armstrong and Indiana Counties' Intermediate Unit #28 (ARIN), and the eleven superintendents of the school districts in Armstrong/Indiana counties met to discuss ways to develop and improve linkages with higher education, basic education, and the community. A Steering Committee (key individuals, decision-makers) was formed in October 1983 and charged with the identification of ways and means of pooling resources to improve the educational process. To date the Steering Committee has initiated over forty projects involving IUP, the Intermediate Unit, and the eleven school districts. The round-table discussion will present the results of this partnership from an administrative, funding, and programmatic view.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

As cited earlier, planned collaboration among higher education, basic education, and the community challenges all parties to share the benefits of partnerships. Enlisting the active involvement of the community is a rewarding and effective way of gaining understanding and support for elementary and secondary education. Also, working with schools provides

higher education with practical input for course and curriculum development. It permits faculty to interact with their colleagues in the public sector for the improvement of teaching.

It is important in developing partnerships that a Steering Committee work diligently to involve educators from both higher education and basic education in planning, organizing and delivering a program for the improvement of schooling in the rural area. Throughout the past three years, the Steering Committee has initiated over forty projects involving IUP departments, the Intermediate Unit, and the eleven school districts. Students at the primary, secondary, and college levels, adult learners, teachers, school administrators, and the business community have been drawn into the partnership activities. The Committee has evaluated and revised curricula, and developed new programs. Teachers and administrators have received advanced training in clinical supervision, and the business community has actively supported the educational programs for students.

It is not enough to have cogent reasons for schools and businesses to work together in developing partnerships and programs for the improvement of schooling. Maintaining the initiative and drive needed for continuation calls for careful planning and marshalling of resources to support all efforts. A partnership venture requires strong commitment and leadership from several sectors if it is to succeed. In particular, the School Superintendent, the President of the University, and the Dean of the College must be highly visible in providing support to the efforts of those who

volunteer their work. It is critical to address questions of need for partnerships and preparing in advance for projects and the activities that will take place. As well-documented by Susan Otterbourg (1986), it will be necessary to assess needs and resources, secure commitments, form committees, and determine possible solutions as the work begins. Well-developed partnerships will include the following:

Advisory Committee

Partnership Staff

Record-keeping Procedures

Program Activities

Evaluation and Reporting Procedures

The business community in particular will be interested in how their funds are used and the results in relation to impact on the number of children and adults served by the partnership.

In summary, the historical background of prior university efforts in participating in partnerships and their success in fostering work relations with public school staff and administrators is critical. Professional exchanges over the past three years have been most rewarding for participants in these partnership efforts and the commitment for continued development continues.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES FOR MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS

We recognize that good will and a positive attitude toward forming partnerships are responsible for success, but this will not necessarily guarantee achievement. Each partner will have to address political, economic and administrative factors that exist within the local community. The advisory committee must translate the ideals and vision that arise in partnerships into concrete activities. Each administrative unit within the partnerships must manage the people involved, acquire resources, deal with organizational policies, and know how to change policies that hinder innovative collaboration. The administrative team in each unit must work diligently to secure internal commitment and a positive view toward the partnership.

It is often difficult for administrators working in public schools to balance the needs and pressures of their own unique environment with the pressures that occur in the university sector. Administrators from each segment must be careful to balance their needs with the competing needs of the other institution in developing the partnership. Frank and open communication of specific concerns will lead to well-designed projects that meet the needs of both parties. At a minimum, the Advisory Committee should meet at least once every six weeks for sustaining the momentum needed for bringing partnership activities to a successful conclusion. One cannot simply believe in a partnership as a cause, but must be willing to make commitments and convince others within their organization that it is vital

for the institutions to work together. It requires a rare combination of vision, fortitude, and patience to lead a partnership to a successful conclusion. Many of the administrative issues will focus on staffing, funding, securing community support, balancing school policies with release time, and other administrative issues. The administrative team must learn how to balance existing personnel needs and existing policy structures effectively and appropriately to bring the partnership to a successful conclusion. In the model developed within our two-county area we have managed to bridge the gap between rural distance and the resource base of the university to enrich the lives of many students in our partnership.

RESULTS

As mentioned earlier, we have initiated over forty different partnership activities during the past three years and have begun to plan an academic alliance for the fall of 1987 with the Geography Department at IUP and the eleven participating public schools. A sampling of several of the projects are as follows, and more complete details are available in the report which will be distributed at the conference. Several of the major projects are as follows:

1. ARIN-IUP Mentorship Project where IUP faculty in mathematics, biology, physics, chemistry and computer programming act as mentors for high ability tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students.

2. The IUP University School provided opportunity to mainstream children enrolled in ARIN Intermediate Unit's Special Education Programs. Operated by IUP, the faculty consists of both public school certified teachers and University professors and has access to IUP's College of Education and Departments of Special Education and Speech and Language.
3. IUP-Indiana County Schools English Co-Teaching Project is an inservice training program for English teachers which provided opportunity for teachers to increase their knowledge of current teaching methodologies. Teachers work with IUP faculty on a weekly basis.
4. TEAMS, Technology Enhanced Activities in Mathematics and Science, provides inservice training to help teachers upgrade their teaching programs, illustrating changes in modern science, mathematics and technology. This program has received continued funding from the National Science Foundation and by an ECIA Chapter II grant.
5. The Principal's Assessment Center, a part of IUP's College of Education, is designed to objectively evaluate potential principal candidates and aid school districts in making hiring decisions. It is one of a network of 27 centers across the country developed through the efforts of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

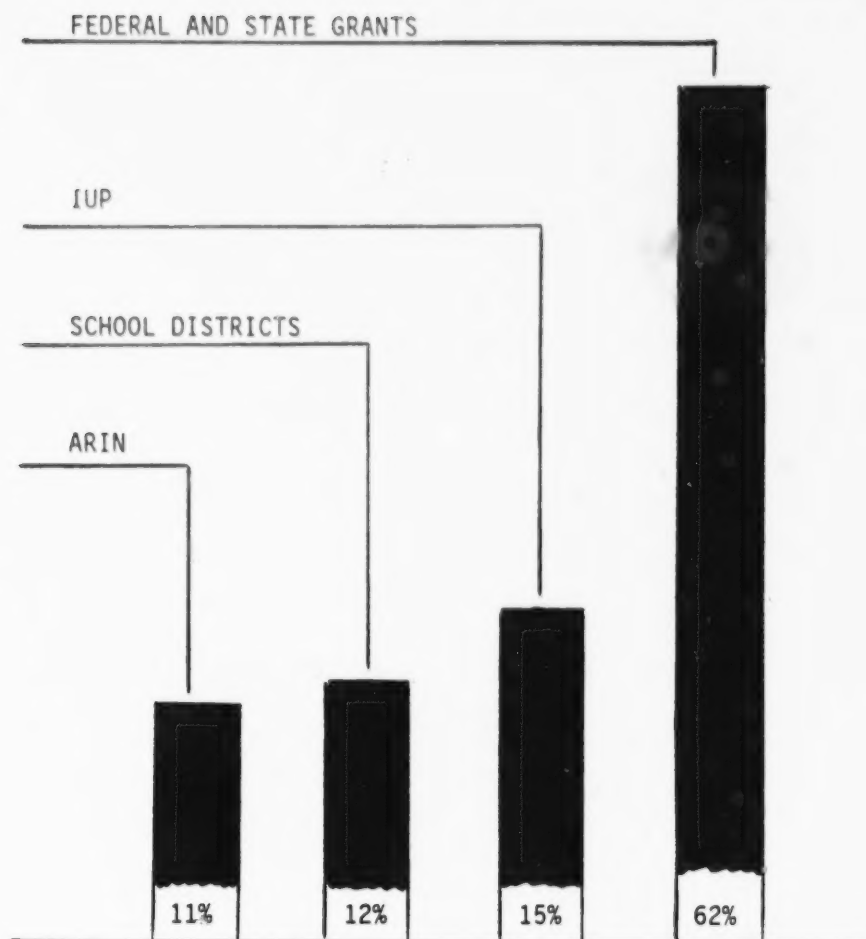


CHART 1 Financial Contributions To The Partnership

Also, the financial support for these efforts has resulted in over \$740,000 being generated from four major sources (see chart 1).

SUMMARY

The focus of this partnership was the development of realistic ventures that would involve public school professionals in collaborative planning with university and community representatives. The practical implications of such a partnership have brought recognition and reward to all those involved. They have also impacted funding, curriculum, administrative decision making and planning in the institutions that have participated to date. While we live and work in a rural area, we feel that the gap has been bridged in bringing the public school, community and university much closer together. We are optimistic as we face the future and begin to initiate new endeavors to keep the partnership thriving.

REFERENCES

Otterbourg, Susan (1986). School Partnerships Handbook. Old Tappen, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.